(b) to (d) Yes. The manuscripts are catelogued and preserved in the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune.

There are 30 manuscripts. All the manuscrips are Sanskrit language. One manuscript is written on birch bark in the ancient *Sharada* script. The remaining 29 manuscrips are written on paper in the *Devangari* script. The oldest manuscript is no. 5/1882-83 and is dated 1464 A.D. These manuscripts have several unique features in terms of scripts, accentuation marks and support material used. These manuscripts are valuable as unique examples of the intellectual and cultural heritage not only of India, but of the world. The Indologist, Prof. F. Max Muller, used of these *Rigveda* manuscripts to prepare his critical edition of the *Rigveda.* The material in this collection of *Rigveda* manuscripts was also used to prepare the well-known Critical Edition of the *Rigveda* by the Vaidika Samshodhana Mandala, a premier institute in Pune for Vedic Studies.

The National Mission for Manuscripts launched to preserve the heritage and culture of India, has set up a Manuscript Conservation Centre at this Institute for providing support in manuscript conservation. The manuscripts are given preventive conservation treatment by way of dusting, clearning and airing. They are kept in good climatic conditions. Handling of the manuscripts is restricted.

All the manuscripts are kept in cupboards of well-seasoned Burma teakwood placed in the Manuscripts Hall of the Institute. The edges of the birch bark manuscript are lined with paper and sheets of soft and this tissue paper have been inserted between every two folios. It is placed in a hard cardboard box lined with Rexene. This box is placed carefully in a wooden drawer of a wooden cupboard meant for the manuscript. The other manuscripts, written on paper, are supported with hard carboards on both sides, wrapped in red cloth and are placed in the Burma teak cupboards of the Manuscripts Library.

Visa for visiting Nankana Sahib

†260. SHRI JAI PARKASH AGGARWAL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether visas are not being issued in time by Pakistan for the Sikh pilgrims of the different States of the country who want to visit Nankana Sahib located in that country;

(b) the reaction of Government therto and the occasions when Government of Pakistan has denied visa so far; and

(c) the measures taken or proposed to be taken by Government to ensure the journey to Nankana Sahib for these devotees?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (c) Government are aware that there have been delays in obtaining of Pakistan visa for pilgrims visiting religious shrines including Nankana Sahib. A proposal to increase both the number of shrines and pilgrims under the Bilateral Protocol on Pilgrimages has been pursued with the Government of Pakistan for over three years. a New visa agreement is also being discussed with Pakistan which should, when finalised, help in easing travel between the two countries including for those intending to visit religious shrines in Pakistan such as Nankana Sahib.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.